DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 131 168 UD 016 569

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TITLE The Listener's Ability to Report Oral Responses of Black and White Children.
PUB DATE Sep 76
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Washington, D. C., September 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American English; Analysis of Variance; *College Students; Communication Problems; *Intelligence Tests; Language Patterns; *Listening Comprehension; *Negro Dialects; Oral Communication; Oral English; Psychological Studies; Racial Factors; Standard Spoken Usage; *Testing Problems; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; WISC

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship of dialect and race of five and six-year old boys to a listener's ability to report the oral response of boys to ten vocabulary items from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC). A group of 20 black and 20 white college students viewed videotapes of eight first grade boys who represented four dialect groups: black standard, black nonstandard, white standard, and white nonstandard. Analysis of three 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAS revealed significant interactions between race and dialect of child relative to (1) a listener's ability to report in writing a child's verbatim responses without producing a change in the WISC scoring of the responses, and (2) a listener's ability to restate in writing a child's responses without producing a change in the scoring of the responses. Further, both dialect and race of child were found to be significantly related to another factor (3) , the total number of errors the listener makes in writing the child's responses. The race of the listener as a main effect was not found to be significantly related to (1), (2), or (3). However, significant interaction did occur between race of listener and race of child; and race of listener, race of child, and dialect of child relative to (3). (Author/JM)

The Listener's Ability to Report Oral Responses of Black and White Children

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Running head: Reporting Oral Responses

Abstract

A group of 20 black and 20 white college students viewed videotapes of 8 first grade boys and recorded in writing the boys' responses to 10 vocabulary items from the WISC. The 8 boys represented 4 dialect groups: black standard; black nonstandard; white standard; and white nonstandard. Analysis of 3, 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAS revealed significant interactions between race and dialect of child relative to (a) a listener's ability to report in writing a child's verbatim responses without producing a change in the WISC scoring of the responses and (b) a listener's ability to restate in writing a child's responses without producing a change in the scoring of the responses. Further, both dialect and race of child were found to be significantly related to (c) the total number of errors the listener makes in writing the child's responses. The race of the listener as a main effect was not found to be significantly related to (a), (b), or (c). However, significant interaction did occur between race of listener and race of child; and race of listener, race of child, and dialect of child relative to (c), the total number of errors the listener makes in writing the child's responses.

The Listener's Ability to Report Oral Responses of Black and White Children

A variety of studies investigating the relationship between language development and cognitive functioning emerged in the early 1960s. Much of the literature that followed these studies seemed to indicate that not only were the children from disadvantaged backgrounds limited in verbal production, but also their language had a detrimental effect on thinking skills (Ausubel, 1964; Bereiter, Englemann, Osborn, & Redford, 1966; Corbin & Crosby, 1965; Cowles, 1967; Deutsch, 1963, 1964; Jensen, 1963; John, 1963; Olin, Hess, & Shipman, 1965). The beliefs, that children from economically and educationally disadvantaged homes are verbally destitute or have an underdeveloped language, have often been lumped together as a "deficit hypothesis." However, the proponents of the "deficit hypothesis" are not without opposition. The opponents question the validity of research which has failed to consider such factors as environmental opportunities, experience in test making, motivation, examiner effects, and phonological and syntactic features which might interfere with mutual intelligibility (Baratz, 1968, 1969; Cazden, 1967, 1970; Cole & Bruner, 1971; Dickie & Bagur, 1972; Duggins, 1965; Houston, 1969, 1970; Labov, 1970; Ponder, 1967).

To date, very little effort has been made to determine whether the low scores children from low SES groups obtain on expressive language tasks are really due to less highly developed ability among these children, inadequate understanding of their speech by teachers and examiners, negative attitudes toward the children's dialect, or due to all of these.

There have been studies which show that listeners can distinguish among speakers according to status (Harms, 1961) and that dialects of speakers produce stereotyped judgments by listeners and do affect listeners' reactions (Ainsfield, Bogo, & Lambert, 1962; Buck, 1968; Choy & Dodd, 1976; Crowl & MacGinitie, 1974; Tucker & Lambert, 1969; Williams, 1970; Williams, Whitehead, & Miller, 1972). The results of these studies highlight the fact that the listener's attitude is usually more favorable toward the speaker who uses a standard dialect or a dialect that is perceived as very similar to his own. The results of the studies which deal directly with the assessment of the listener's comprehension have been equivocal. One is encouraged by the results of some studies (Baratz, 1969; Choy & Dodd, 1976; Eisenberg, Berlin, Dill, & Frank, 1968; Hall, Reder, & Cole, 1975; Harms, 1961) to believe that the highest comprehension of verbal speech occurs when listener and speaker status is the same. However, the results of additional studies indicate that the comprehension of dialect is not that simple. Some experimenters found that black and white children comprehend standard dialect better than nonstandard dialect, but that

black children are able to understand and recall what a black or nonstandard dialect speaker has said better than white children (Genshaft & Hirt, 1974; Seitz, 1975; Stevens, Ruder, & Tew, 1973); while others found that comprehension is not significantly better when the speaker and listener are of the same status or ethnic group or utilize the same dialect (Copple & Suci, 1974; Hall & Freedle, 1973; Hall, Turner, & Russell, 1973; Levy & Cook, 1973; Marwit & Neumann, 1974; Peisach, 1965; Quay, 1972, 1974; Weener, 1969). Most of the studies that attempted to measure the comprehension of oral language assessed the children's ability to comprehend different dialects and speakers rather than the adult's ability to understand the children. In those studies intelligibility of standard English is not viewed as a major problem for the children. Yet, there remains a paucity of information concerning the adult's ability to accurately report what the children of different ethnic groups and dialect status have said.

In focusing attention on the comparison studies of language development that have been conducted, Ervin-Tripp (1971) specifically mentions the value of knowing whether teachers understand their pupils. In the present study the experimenters decided to go one step farther by asking not only whether a listener makes errors in reporting what a child says, but whether or not such errors would affect a child's score on an expressive language task. The study

investigated the relationship of dialect and race of five- and six-year-old boys to a listener's ability to report the oral responses of the boys to ten vocabulary items from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC).

Method

Subjects

The 40 subjects for this study were students at Southern Illinois University. An advertisement, stating that black and white college students were needed to view videotapes and that they would be paid $2 for the work involved, was placed in the campus newspaper. An equal number of black and white, male and female students (20 black, 10 male and 10 female; and 20 white, 10 male and 10 female) were selected on a "first come-first serve" basis from those who responded to the advertisement. These subjects formed the listener population.

Materials and Stimuli

Prior to the actual experimental procedure, the first author recorded language samples of 17 five- and six-year-old black and white boys in their home or outside the home, with friends or family members present. An effort was made to select only those children whose language was characterized by the linguistic features of standard white, standard black, nonstandard white, or nonstandard black dialect. Four dialecticians listened to each tape recording and determined whether or not the child's speech was representative of standard or nonstandard dialect speakers. Their decisions were

based on the presence or absence of a list of specific phonological and syntactical features which systematic observation has indicated are associated with standard black and white dialect, nonstandard black dialect and nonstandard white dialect (Baratz, 1969; Fasold & Wolfram, 1970; Malmstrom, 1969; McDavid, 1972; Menyuk, 1971; O'Brien, 1973; Pooley, 1966; Stewart, 1969; Fasold, Note 1).

The 12 children whose speech best represented the 4 categories--3 black children who used standard English, 3 white children who used standard English, 3 black children who used nonstandard English and 3 white children who used nonstandard English--were selected for the next step in forming the stimulus pool. The children ranged in age from 5 years 5 months to 6 years 6 months with a mean age of 5 years 8 months, and none had any serious articulation errors.

A videotape was made of each of the selected children responding to 10 vocabulary questions from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children. The children were brought to a quiet but comfortable looking room at the University for the videotaping. The children were videotaped one at a time and were allowed to explore the room, look at their peers in the camera, and settle themselves comfortably in a large reclining chair before the taping began (only the child and the experimenter were in the room during the actual taping). Each child knew he was to be paid $1 to participate in the study,

and was given the $1 at the end of the taping session. Only the child was filmed and his responses to the questions were left on the tape as the stimulus pool for the study. The experimenter was a white female who was trained and experienced in the administration and scoring of the WISC, having administered over 300 tests. She presented the first 10 questions from the vocabulary subtest of the WISC as follows:

> We talked before about all kinds of things that you like to do. Now I would like to know how many words you know. Listen carefully and tell me what the words mean.

Although the experimenters were aware of the critical role that race of examiner can play when children are performing cognitive and decision tasks (Moore & Retish, 1974; Sattler, 1970), no attempt was made to control for the experimenter's race since she was not functioning in the traditional role of the examiner. She had already spent two hours with each child in an informal setting and her task was to elicit as much verbalization as possible from each child rather than to administer the vocabulary items in a prescribed manner.

Audio recordings were made of the tape recordings and two dialecticians were asked to listen to each tape recording in order to determine if the speech samples obtained for the stimulus pool were representative of each of the four dialect categories. It was necessary to exclude some children because of their limited speech sample and because the raters were not able to determine standardness

of the children's speech. The final stimulus pool contained the videotape recordings of eight children who best represented the four categories. There were two black children who used standard English, two white children who used standard English, two black children who used nonstandard English, and two white children who used nonstandard English. The reliability ratings for the dialecticians were 100% agreement for the black nonstandard and white standard categorizations, 91% for the black standard categorization, and 80% for the white nonstandard categorization.

The experimenter wrote down the children's responses directly from the tape (the tapes were played many times in order to ensure accurate transcription) and then scored these responses according to the rules for the WISC vocabulary items (Wechsler, 1949), with each response receiving either a 2, 1, or 0 score. The responses were scored independently by another psychologist who was not familiar with the study, but had equivalent training and experience in the administration and scoring of the WISC. The Pearson product-moment correlation between the two scorers' ratings was .979.

Procedure

The subjects were brought to a quiet room equipped with a videotape, one receiver, and one monitor. It was possible to allow small groups of subjects to view the stimulus tapes at the same time. Each subject was given the following instructions orally and in writing:

I would like you to watch these videotapes of children. You will view 1 child at a time responding to 10 questions. First you are to copy down the child's response to each question exactly as you hear it. Start writing as soon as the child begins responding to the question. I will stop the machine to give you time to report his response. When you have recorded all 10 of the child's responses, I will give you time to restate any of the child's responses that are not clear, so that they would be very clear to a typical first grade teacher. Be careful not to change the child's meaning. If his response is already clear, simply write same in the column labeled restatement.

It took the subjects from 2 to 2 1/2 hours to complete the viewing and writing.

The children's responses, as reported by the listeners, were scored according to the criteria listed in the WISC manual independently by the experimenter and another psychologist who had equivalent training in the administration and scoring of the WISC. Identifying information concerning the child or listener was eliminated. The Pearson product-moment correlation between the ratings was .972. The children's scores on their responses as recorded and scored by the experimenter were used as a standard with which to: compare the scores on each child's verbatim responses as reported by the subjects and scored by the experimenter (Verbatim Change Score); and compare

the scores for each child on the restated responses as reported by the subjects and scored by the experimenter (Interpreration Change Score). The number of errors the subjects made in reporting the children's verbatim responses, when compared to the experimenter's standard, was also recorded (Error Score). An error consisted of any omission, substitution, addition, or distortion of what the tape demonstrated the child actually said.

Design

The data were analyzed by a 2 (race of subject) x 2 (race of child) x 2 (dialect of child) ANOVA. Race and dialect were within effects, while the race of the listener was the between effect. A separate ANOVA was run for each of the three dependent variables: Verbatim Change Score, Interpretation Change Score, and Error Score.

Results

It should be noted that the means for the Verbatim and Interpretation Change Scores (Table 1) were all negative which would result in lower WISC raw scores relative to the standard.

Insert Table 1 about here

The analyses for both the Verbatim and Interpretative Change Scores produced similar results as there were significant interactions between race and dialect of child--Verbatim Change Score, F (1, 38) = 32.0994, $p < .001$; Interpretation Change Score, F (1, 38) = 38.7025, $p < .001$--and no other significant effects. Investigation of the

interaction effect for the Verbatim Change Score indicates that the listeners produced higher mean Verbatim Change Scores when recording the responses of the black standard dialect group (-2.37500) relative to the white standard dialect group. However, when the listeners recorded the responses of the nonstandard dialect group, higher mean Verbatim Change Scores were produced for the white children (-2.30000) than for the black children (-1.42500). Visual inspection of the means for the Interpretation Change Scores shows the same interaction effect where the listeners' recordings resulted in higher mean change scores for the black standard dialect group (-2.18750) than the white standard group (-1.21250); but higher mean change scores for the white nonstandard group (-2.30000) than the black nonstandard group (-1.41250).

When the Error Score was used as the dependent variable, there were significant main effects for race of child, F (1, 38) = 89.5549, $p < .001$, and dialect of child, F (1, 38) = 368.6046, $p < .001$, as well as significant interactions between race of child and race of listener, F (1, 38) = 10.0507, $p < .01$; race of child and dialect of child, F (1, 38) = 1322.4309, $p = < .001$; and race of child, dialect of child and race of listener, F (1, 38) = 5.1091, $p < .05$. A comparison of the mean Error Scores for the main effect of race of child (Table 2) indicates that the listeners made more errors when recording the black children's responses (177.60625) than they did when recording the white children's responses (160.18125). A comparison of the

means for the main effect of dialect of child indicates that the listeners made more errors when recording the responses of the nonstandard dialect group (194.06250) than when recording the responses of the standard dialect group (143.72500). The significant two way interaction between race of child and race of listener indicates that the change scores produced for black and white children differ in magnitude across race of listener. The mean Error Score for black listeners when recording the black children's responses was 180.70000 while the mean Error Score for white listeners when recording the black children's responses was 174.51250. When the listeners recorded the responses of the white children, the black listeners' mean Error Score was 169.11250 while the white listeners' mean Error Score was 151.25000.

Relative to the interaction between race of child and dialect of child, it is evident that the listeners made more errors when recording the responses of the black standard dialect group (238.81250) than when recording the responses of the white standard dialect group (48.63750). However, when they recorded the responses of the nonstandard dialect group, the listeners made more errors when recording the white children's responses (271.72500) rather than the black children's responses (116.40000). The three way interaction between race of child, dialect of child, and race of listener (Table 3) can best be explained in conjunction with the interaction between race of child and race of listener in which it was evident that the black listeners made more

errors, relative to the white listeners, in recording the responses of black and white children. However, when the variable of dialect of child was also investigated, one discovers that the black listeners made more errors than the white listeners in recording the responses of the black and white standard dialect children and the white nonstandard dialect ch[illegible]t fewer errors when recording the responses of the black [illegible]rd dialect children.

Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the listeners, as a group, made errors in recording and interpreting the responses of the children and that these errors resulted in lower WISC raw scores. However, race of listener as a main effect was not found to be related to these changes in scores. This finding is supportive of the previous studies that found that comprehension of speech is not significantly better when speaker and listener are of the same status or ethnic group (Copple & Suci, 1974; Hall & Freedle, 1973; Hall, Turner, & Russell, 1973; Levy & Cook, 1973; Marwit & Neumann, 1974; Peisach, 1965; Weener, 1969).

When total number of errors was used as the criterion measure, it was found that more errors were made in recording the responses of the black children relative to the white children. This result is in agreement with Eisenberg, Berlin, and Dill's (1968) study which reports that white children were better understood by teachers than black children.

Another significant main effect that was found when total number of errors was used as the criterion was that the listeners made more errors when recording the responses of the nonstandard dialect children rather than the standard dialect children. If one agrees with Kernan (1971) that lack of intelligibility between English dialects may not be a matter of linguistic f[illegible] alone, but may also involve attitudes, then these findi[illegible]ould b[illegible] in accord with those of Buck (1968), Crowl and MacGinitie (1974), Williams (1970), and Williams, Whitehead, and Miller (1972) who found that listeners had a more favorable attitude toward standard dialect speakers rather than nonstandard dialect speakers. But one must look at the significant interaction effects before attempting to make general conclusions. The interaction between race of child and race of listener indicates that the black listener made more errors than the white listener when recording the responses of both black and white children, but that the difference was more apparent in their recordings of the white children's responses. This finding is in agreement with that of Bryson (1972) who found that white counselors understood both black and white clients better than did black counselors. Yet the triple interaction between race of child, dialect of child, and race of listener indicates that the black listeners made fewer errors than the white listeners when recording the responses of black nonstandard dialect children. If one can generalize from children to adults, then these findings are in accord

with those of Genshaft and Hirt (1974), Seitz (1975), and Stevens, Ruder, and Tew (1973) who found that both black and white children comprehend standard dialect better than nonstandard, but that black children are able to recall and understand what a nonstandard dialect speaker has said better than white children.

The interaction between race of child and dialect of child indicates that the listeners made more errors when recording the responses of the black standard dialect children than when recording the responses of white standard dialect children, but that when they were listening to nonstandard dialect children they made more errors in recording the white children's responses rather than the black children's response

It seems reasonable to explore an admittedly ad hoc variable that was not controlled in this study, the mean number of words in the children's responses. The mean number of words per response for each child ranged from 11.5 words to 65.6 words. As a group, the standard dialect black children averaged 38.20 words per response; the standard dialect white children averaged 13.65 words per response; the nonstandard dialect black children averaged 23.6 words per response; and the nonstandard dialect white children averaged 42.05 words per response. This information could be used as a possible explanation as to why the listeners made the most errors when recording the responses of the white nonstandard dialect children,

next the black standard dialect children, then the black nonstandard dialect children, and the fewest errors when recording the responses of the white standard dialect children. The number of errors seems to be related to the number of words produced by the children. If one can assume some constant in the number of errors produced per amount spoken, then the Error Score analysis would reflect word productivity.

What must be pointed out in this study is that if the negative change scores that occurred and the total number of errors made in recording the children's responses are considered measures of understanding, then the listeners as a group did not do very well in terms of understanding the children. It would seem appropriate to require some training in listening to and understanding what children say for those who are going to work with children, but especially for those people who administer tests to the children and have the power to make important decisions about the children based on what they heard the children say.

Reference Note

1. Fasold, R. Will black English readers work? A lecture given at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, May 1972.

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Table 1

Means for Type VI "Mixed Design" ANOVA in Which Verbatim Change Score and Interpretation Change Score are the Dependent Variables

Verbatim Change Score		Interpretation Change Score	
1	2	1	2
A Means, B = 1, C = 1		A Means, B = 1, C = 1	
-1.27500	-2.02500	-1.1500	-2.0000
A Means, B = 2, C = 1		A Means, B = 2, C = 1	
-2.1500	-1.42500	-2.15000	-1.40000
A Means, B = ., C = 1		A Means, B = ., C = 1	
-1.71250	-1.72500	-1.65000	-1.70000
B Means, A = ., C = 1		B Means, A = ., C = 1	
-1.6500	-1.78750	-1.57500	-1.77500
A Means, B = 1, C = 2		A Means, B = 1, C = 2	
-1.47500	-2.72500	-1.27500	-2.37500
A Means, B = 2, C = 2		A Means, B = 2, C = 2	
-2.45000	-1.42500	-2.4500	-1.42500
A Means, B = ., C = 2		A Means, B = ., C = 2	
-1.96250	-2.07500	-1.86250	-1.90000
B Means, A = ., C = 2		B Means, A = ., C = 2	
-2.10000	-1.93750	-1.82500	-1.93750

Table 1--Continued

Verbatim Change Score		Interpretation Change Score	
1	2	1	2
C Means, A = ., B = .		C Means, A = ., B = .	
-1.71875	-2.01875	-1.67500	-1.88125
A Means, B = 1, C = .		A Means, B = 1, C = .	
-1.37500	-2.37500	-1.21250	-2.18750
A Means, B = 2, C = .		A Means, B = 2, C = .	
-2.30000	-1.42500	-2.30000	-1.41250
A Means, B = ., C = .		A Means, B = ., C = .	
-1.83750	-1.90000	-1.75625	-1.80000
B Means, A = ., C = .		B Means, A = ., C = .	
-1.87500	-1.86250	-1.70000	-1.85625

Note. A = Race of child, where 1 is white, 2 is black.

B = Dialect of child, where 1 is standard, 2 is nonstandard.

C = Race of listener, where 1 is white, 2 is black.

Table 2

Means for Type VI "Mixed Design" ANOVA in Which Error Score is the Dependent Variable

1	2
A Means, B = 1, C = 1	
44.52500	229.80000
A Means, B = 2, C = 1	
257.97500	119.22500
A Means, B = ., C = 1	
151.25000	174.51250
B Means, A = ., C = 1	
137.16250	188.60000
A Means, B = 1, C = 2	
52.75000	247.82500
A Means, B = 2, C = 2	
285.47500	113.57500
A Means, B = ., C = 2	
169.11250	180.70000
B Means, A = ., C = 2	
150.28750	199.52500
C Means, A = ., B = .	
162.88125	174.90625

Table 2--Continued

1	2
A Means, B = 1, C = .	
48.63750	238.81250
A Means, B = 2, C = .	
271.72500	116.40000
A Means, B = ., C = .	
160.18125	177.50625
B Means, A = ., C = .	
143.72500	194.06250

Note. A = Race of child, where 1 is white, 2 is black.

B = Dialect of child, where i is standard, 2 is nonstandard.

C = Race of listener, where 1 is white, 2 is black.

Table 3

Presentation of the Interaction Between Race of Child, Dialect of Child, and Race of Listener

Race of Listener	Race of Child	Dialect of Child	
		Standard	Nonstandard
Black	Black	247.82500	113.57500
	White	52.75000	285.47500
White	Black	229.80000	119.22500
	White	44.52500	257.97500

Note. The numerals represent mean Error Scores.